DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 624 RC 014 741

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TITLE Improving Service for Handicapped Students in Rural Areas: A Program.
INSTITUTION College of St. Rose, Albany, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Apr 84
GRANT G009301642
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrators; Attitude Change; Change Agents; *College School Cooperation; *Cooperative Programs; Delivery Systems; *Disabilities; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Mainstreaming; *Needs Assessment; Preservice Teacher Education; Program Descriptions; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; School Districts; School Surveys; Special Education; *Special Education Teachers; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *College of Saint Rose NY; Public Law 94 142

ABSTRACT

A 3-year cooperative program between the College of Saint Rose (Albany, New York) and surrounding rural school districts has two main goals: to help rural Chief School Officers (CSOs) design staff development activities to meet educational needs of mainstreamed handicapped students and to improve the college's preservice teacher education program so that graduating students will be better prepared to provide services to rural handicapped students. During the program's first year (1983-84), 13 CSOs responded to a needs assessment survey related to program goals. It is planned that three rural regions, organized from 15 districts, will collaborate with the college through rural teams composed of administrators and faculty and/or school board members. At an orientation meeting in November 1983, generally-held concerns of CSOs were identified as: attitudes of regular classroom teachers toward mainstreaming, the need for inservice and the need for appropriate materials and instructional strategies for mainstreaming. In March 1984, a meeting between College faculty and Region I CSOs included presentations on rural inservice activities through the Board of Cooperative Education Services, rural inservice using consultants, and strategies and issues for learning disabled in rural areas. A College Task Force has been established, has interacted with the Region I rural team, and has begun to think about curricular changes. Assessment survey results are appended. (MH)

ED243624

Improving Service for Handicapped Students in Rural Areas: A Program

By

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The College of Saint Rose

April 1984

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Paper presented at the Annual American Educational Research Association Meeting (New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984)

RC014741

Running Head: Improving Service

Improving Service to Handicapped

Students in Rural Areas: A Program

This program reported herein, funded by the Office of Education, is concerned with the education of handicapped students in rural school districts. It is designed to help rural Chief School Officers (CSOs) implement staff development programs addressing the problems encountered in meeting the educational needs of students with handicapping conditions. In addition, the program is designed to help the College of Saint Rose Education Division improve their preservice curriculum.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) mandates that handicapped children receive a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. This act has had far-reaching implications for all persons involved in public education. Colleges of education have modified preservice curricula to prepare regular classroom teachers to meet this challenge.

For the immediately preceding four years, The College of Saint Rose (CSR) received Dean's Grants which supported activities related to attitudinal and curricular changes consistent with P.L. 94-142 in the preservice training of elementary, secondary, special education and communication disorders teachers. Those

This project is supported by a grant from the United States Department of Education (Grant No. G008301642).

changes are now in place.

However, the instituted changes in curriculum did not address the distinctions among urban, suburban and rural school districts which mediate services to the handicapped. Cole and Rankin (1981) noted that programs that successfully mainstream students with handicapping conditions into regular classrooms in urban districts are not always successful in rural districts. Sher (1978) pointed out that federal educational agencies had historically overlooked the differing needs of special education students in rural areas. Others (Helge, 1980, 1981; Tunick, Platt, & Bowen, 1980; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1981) detailed the differences between rural and urban districts that highlight the difficulty of delivery of services to handicapped students in rural settings: sparse populations, fewer students with handicapping conditions, isolation from professional development opportunities, negative and uninformed community attitudes toward the handicapped, minimal financial base.

For such reasons, it appears that the rural teacher must be more adaptive and resourceful, stretching available resources across many areas of exceptionality. Further complicating the services to handicapped students in rural areas are the often long distances to and from schools, uncertain road conditions, and

absenteeism (Latham, 1981). Helge (1981) has identified all the major components of complying with P.L. 94-142 as problem areas for rural schools, not the least of which is recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

The literature clearly suggests that preservice training should address the special needs of the rural school district. The presently reported program was developed in response to that identified need. A collaborative endeavor between CSR and surrounding rural school districts, the grant provides services to the local schools and a field base for generating and testing preservice curricular change.

The program has two main goals:

(1) To assist rural CSOs to design staff development activities which address the specific problems encountered in their school districts in attempting to meet the educational needs of handicapped students in regular classrooms.

(2) To establish a preservice teacher education program at CSR that produces graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which will enable them to successfully work with mainstreamed learners in rural school districts.

Five general objectives flow from these goals.

#1- To improve the education of handicapped students in regular classes by helping CSOs plan staff development programs

addressing the needs of personnel at the school building and district levels.

#2- To utilize the expertise of rural CSOs (and teachers and school board members) to improve the preservice curriculum, such that graduating teachers will have the skills to work more effectively with handicapped learners in rural school settings.

#3- To provide practicum and student teaching settings in which the unique needs of handicapped students in rural school districts are being addressed.

#4- To provide preservice students the opportunity to serve as "rural interns" in selected rural school districts. (Rural interns will work with a mentor in a rural setting after having completed student teaching.)

#5- To provide a model program for other teacher training institutions.

The program is in the first year of a three year sequence. The approach is to identify and work with a core of people from rural school districts and from the education faculty at CSR. These initial groups will then be the catalyst for interaction and change in both constituent settings. Appropriate evaluation is planned for every stage of the program.

Of the 24 school districts in the geographic vicinity of CSR,

15 are classified by enrollment and community type as rural schools. (New York State does not have criteria for nor label schools as rural, suburban, or urban.) All 15 such identified school districts have agreed to work with CSR on this program. Each district has identified a team (administrator and some combination of faculty and/or school board members) to participate in the program. They have been organized into three geographic regions, designated Regions I, II, and III. Each region will experience similar interaction with the college in rotation. Planning meetings with the individual CSOs have been/will be followed by regional meetings. Then student teachers will be assigned to districts, followed by the assignment of rural interns.

At the college, one faculty member in each discipline of the education division has volunteered to serve on a task force which interacts with the rural regional teams. Needed curricular changes will grow out of this interaction and be communicated to the remaining education faculty, who will then formulate and implement the curricular change.

During this first year of the program, needs assessment has been a priority. Preliminary assessment of CSOs was conducted by mail during the summer months. This was followed by a meeting of the CSOs and the grant staff during the Fall semester at which regional groups generated consensus lists of needs and concerns.

This was followed up by individual meetings with the CSOs in Region I in their school settings to establish an appropriate agenda for the first Region meeting in March, 1984. The education faculty was brought up to date on the grant progress, volunteers for the task force were recruited, and faculty were pre-assessed on knowledge and attitudes about educating handicapped learners in rural settings. Data were collected on what courses and curricula are currently addressing the topic of rural education. CSOs were surveyed on numbers/kinds of handicapping conditions in their district and what staff development activities had been offered in the past three years in relation to serving handicapped learners. Each member of the regional teams has been pre-assessed on knowledge and attitudes about educating handicapped learners in rural settings.

The Region I sequence has been initiated. Using the summer pre-assessment and the consensus lists, the program director and coordinator discussed with the CSOs which needs should be addressed at the Region I meeting in March. The agenda included three presentations: "Mechanisms for Rural Inservice Activities Through BOCES" (the Board of Cooperative Education Services); "Strategies and Issues for Learning Disabled in Rural Areas;" and "Mechanisms for Rural Inservice Through the Use of Consultants." In addition, the CSR Task Force met with the District Teams in a small group

activity that generated a list of skills and attitudes needed by the rural teacher. The final activity of year one will be a two-day workshop in late Spring for all 15 school districts and the CSR education faculty to be presented by Doris Helge and Larry Marrs from the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES). The first day will be a workshop for administrators and others on the Region Teams on inservices and problems of mainstreaming in rural areas. Day two will be a workshop for teachers, parents and college students on teacher preparation for rural teaching, covering critical issues facing rural special educators and mainstreaming in rural areas.

Assessment Instruments and Results

The needs assessment of CSOs conducted in the Summer of 1983 addressed the issues of meeting times, place and format of group meetings (Section I), needs assessment in regard to grant objective number 1: To improve the education of handicapped students in regular classes by helping CSOs plan staff development programs (Section II), and needs assessment in regard to grant objective number 2: To utilize the expertise of rural CSOs in local education agencies to improve the preservice curriculum at CSR, such that graduating teachers will have the skills to work more effectively with handicapped learners in rural settings (Section III).

Table 1 contains the results from Section II of the survey reported in percentage of those responding (N=13). Respondents rated the importance of each item on a scale of 1 to 5, unimportant to very important, respectively. The expressed need for help in staff development planning and instructional strategies was greater than that for information regarding handicapping conditions.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 contains the results from Section III of the summer CSO survey. It is reported in percentages of those responding. Respondents expressed strong needs for information and interaction with college faculty and students in order to effectively impact on preservice curricular change.

Insert Table 2 about here

At the Orientation meeting in November, 1983, the district CSOs worked in Regional groups to generate consensus lists of needs and concerns. Generally held concerns included the attitudes of regular classroom teachers toward mainstreaming, the need for

appropriate materials and instructional strategies for mainstreaming, and the need for inservice. Problem areas identified were a lack of programs for the handicapped, travel constraints, problems associated with the identification of the handicapped, and problems associated with insufficient numbers of students within identification categories. Concerns and ideas generated by single Regions, but not reflected across regions included a desire for the project to concentrate on the secondary level, doubts about the effectiveness of the Regional team approach, a suggestion that student teacher experiences and inservice activities be combined, and an appeal for inservice in the areas of art, music, and adaptive physical education.

Pre-assessment of the CSR faculty and the Region teams on knowledge, attitudes and needs was conducted prior to the first regional meeting in March. In addition, the CSR faculty were asked to report the current status of rural education in the CSR preservice curriculum. This Faculty Survey (pre-assessment) contained six sections. Nineteen full and part time faculty responded. (Not all faculty responded to all sections or questions within sections.) The Regional Team Survey contained 4 of the sections on the CSR instrument. Only Region I has been surveyed at this point. Nine administrators and teachers responded.

Section I consisted of five short answer questions designed to assess current knowledge and attitudes about special education in rural settings. Asked to "List the characteristics of rural life that probably limit services to the handicapped, compared to services in urban or suburban settings," common CSR faculty responses were distance to services, limited funds, fewer students with handicapping conditions, geographic isolation, lack of support groups, and inability to attract qualified personnel. The rural Region I responses included, in addition to the above, problems of the family of the handicapped and the need of administrators to wear "many hats."

Characteristics that might contribute to <u>better</u> services for the handicapped in rural areas were seen by CSR faculty to be those aspects of rural life that contribute to a sense of community: concern for others, spirit of sharing, community involvement in church and fire company, and teachers living in the community. School factors, such as smaller classes, more flexibility, greater appreciation for services rendered, less hostility and more caring were also mentioned. There were no differences between CSR and Rural Team responses.

Responses of CSR faculty to "List the organizational differences of which you are currently aware between rural and

urban/suburban school districts that you think would impact upon the delivery of services to the handicapped, e.g. personnel and job descriptions" included recognition of fewer administrators in rural areas, lack of administrator with sole and direct responsibility for programming for handicapped, lack of personnel with specialized training, and the need for specialized personnel to travel among rural schools. In a positive vein, some CSR faculty noted that rural schools sometimes have greater control over their budgets and greater autonomy than other school districts. Other issues raised by the Rural Team members concerned problems associated with their dependence on the BOCES services (travel, staff turnover, isolation from regular teachers) and burn-out caused by multiple responsibilities among service providers.

CSR faculty were not able to list many external resources of which they were aware that were available to aid the rural, regular classroom teacher in servicing the handicapped. Although the Rural Team members as a whole were aware of more external resources, most listed only BOCES and the State Education Department.

Asked to list "any characteristics, knowledge, or skills" necessary for successful teaching in a rural district that "are not also required" in other teaching settings, a common response

from CSR faculty was that there was no differences other than cultural awareness. Responses from individual faculty mentioned having to generate materials of low cost, dealing with less well-educated parents, needing more background information on rural handicapped, and dealing with fewer resources. The Rural Team responses centered more on the need for broader skills because of the lack of specialists in rural areas.

Sections II and III of the Faculty Survey assessed the current coverage of rural education and handicapping conditions in courses offered at CSR. For 56% of the courses reported on (n=71), the topic of rural versus urban versus suburban educational setting was declared relevant to a specific course curriculum. In 45% of those courses, educational setting is currently being discussed. In those courses in which setting is currently discussed, the average amount of course time spent is 2.23 hours (SD=2.07), going from a low of 1/2 hour to a high of 9 hours. Apportionment of time across educational settings is equal for only 31% of the courses reported. Urban settings receive the most time in 42% of the courses, suburban in 27%, urban/suburban combined in 33%. In no course reported did rural settings receive the most time. Rural educational settings received the least time in 67% of the courses reported.

For those NON-SPECIAL EDUCATION courses reported on (Section III), the topic of handicapping conditions was declared relevant to the objectives of 80% of the courses. The average amount of time spent discussing handicapping conditions per course is 2.19 hours (SD=1.37). While in 90% of the courses specific handicapping conditions are discussed, only 17% of the reported courses give equal coverage to all the major handicapping conditions. Mental retardation and learning disabilities receive the most coverage; physical handicaps, the least.

Section IV was a Lykert Scale attitude questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed and validated under the previous Dean's Grant. It was designed to assess the degree to which participants in the grant activities concurred with the attitudes held by the Dean's Grant staff and espoused by the grant objectives. Since the attitude values remain the same for the Rural Education Grant, the instrument is still appropriate. The responding faculty disagreed with the grant staff on statement 9 (See Table 3), with which the staff agrees, gave mixed responses on statements 1, 15, and 16, with which the grant staff disagree, and on 2, 6, and 17, with which the grant staff agrees. All other statements were rated in the direction of grant staff attitudes. The Rural Team members disagreed with the grant staff

on statement 17, with which the staff agrees, agreed with statement 1, with which the staff disagrees, and gave mixed responses on statements 2 and 6 with which the staff agree and on statements 3, 7, 14, and 16 with which the grant staff disagree. Table 3 includes the percentage of responses at each point on the scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree for both the CSR faculty and the Region I Rural Team.

Insert Table 3 about here

Section V of the survey asked respondents to indicate their personal needs for more information on a variety of relevant topics. They responded in accord with a scale of 1 to 5, little or no need to urgent need, respectively. There was little urgent need expressed by CSR faculty for information on any topic. Topics with moderate need among the faculty were: sources other than BOCES available to rural districts, state testing requirements, problems of rural education, CSR preservice programs (mainly part-time faculty), and staff development techniques. Rural team respondents expressed strong to urgent needs for information about instructional techniques for specific handicapping conditions, for other resources available to rural districts, for attitude

changing techniques, for grant objectives and activities, for CSR preservice programs and for staff development techniques. Table 4 includes the percentages of faculty and Rural Team members responding at each level of the scale.

Insert Table 4 about here

Section VI addressed the personal contact needs of the CSR faculty in regard to the grant program. Again, no urgent needs were expressed, but moderate needs exist for each type of personal contact: CSOs, teachers, parents, Board of Education members, handicapped children and grant staff. Table 5 includes the percentages responding at each level of the scale little or no need to urgent need.

Insert Table 5 about here

The final section of both surveys gave the opportunity for open-ended response on any aspect of the questions or the grant. Very few respondents had additional comments. No patterns were noticed.

The number of identified handicapped children in the districts reporting (n=3) are 38, 186, and 139. One district has a self-contained special education class; all three have resource rooms. Only one school district reported prior staff development efforts directed toward implementation of federal and state laws regarding education for all handicapped children. Major staff development vehicles reported by the three districts included inservice credit, graduate course credit, two conference days per year and BOCES inservice offerings.

The outcome of the interaction between the CSR Task Force and the Rural Teams at the March meeting was a list of statements related to skills and knowledge that should be imparted to preservice teachers regarding teaching in rural districts. The list fairly closely replicated the results of the preassessment survey reported above. The CSR Task Force had a follow-up meeting at which they decided that they had much to learn yet, but would begin disseminating what they had learned so far to their colleagues.

Summary

The first year of the program has been devoted to needs assessment and beginning programming with rural Region I. The needs assessment indicated a desire on the part of the

rural CSCs for help in staff development planning and instructional strategies. These needs have been addressed in the Region I March meeting and will continue to be addressed at the June meeting. The interaction with Region I will be analyzed and the analysis used to plan the Region II and III cycles.

The CSR Task Force has been established, has interacted with the rural team from Region I, and has begun to think about curricular change. The current curriculum does not address rural education setting with the same emphasis as urban/suburban setting. However, handicapping conditions have been integrated into the curriculum successfully as a result of the previous Dean's Grant.

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Table 1

Needs Assessment of Chief School Officers in Regard to Grant Objective 1

Expressed Needs	Precentage of Responses (unimportant to very important) 1	2	3	4	5
Staff Development Planning					
using outside consultants	0	8	31	38	23
using in-house expertise	0	15	8	38	38
using BOCES resources	0	15	15	62	8
using resources of other schools	0	15	38	23	23
establishing in-house resource teams	8	8	23	46	15
developing agendas for staff development and training	0	8	15	62	15
selecting materials for staff development and training	0	8	15	77	8

(table continues)

Expressed Needs	Percentage of Responses (unimportant to very important) 1	2	3	4	5
Staff Development Planning					
techniques for facilitating	0	8	31	38	23
techniques for clarifying attitudes toward the handicapped	9	9	45	18	18
Education for Learners with Handicapping Conditions					
descriptions and symptomology					
physical handicaps	8	0	50	17	25
hearing handicaps	9	9	55	18	9
visual handicaps	9	9	55	18	9
mental retardation	8	8	58	17	8
learning disability	8	0	50	25	17
emotional handicaps	0	0	25	25	50
communication disorders	0	0	33	17	50

(table continues)

Expressed Needs	Percentage of Responses (unimportant to very important) 1	3	3	4	5
Education for Learners with Handicapping Conditions					
instructional materials for handicapped learners	0	0	38	54	8
instructional techniques for handicapped learners	0	0	8	62	31
resources: federal, state, college, BOCES, parent groups	0	0	31	38	31
Federal and State laws and regulations	0	31	23	23	23
alternative testing techniques	0	8	38	38	15
parent-teacher-school relations	0	0	42	33	25

(table continues)

	Percentage of Responses (unimportant to very important)				
Expressed Needs	1	2	3	4	5
Education for Learners with Handicapping Conditions					
behavior management	0	0	23	31	46
task analysis procedures	0	15	23	46	8

Note. Not all respondents answered every question.

Where percentages do not add to 100%, it is because of rounding.

Table 2

Needs Assessment of Chief School Officers in Regard to Grant Objective 2

Preparation for helping CSR staff	Percentages Responding (unimportant to very important) 1	2	3	4	5
Description of preservice program	0	8	15	46	31
Copies of the competency based program descriptions	0	0	23	38	38
Discussions with faculty about the preservice program	0	0	15	54	31
Discussions with students about the preservice program	0	8	8	54	31
Visits to CSR, including class observations	0	0	31	62	8

Note. Not all respondents answered every question.

Where percentages do not add to 100%, it is because of rounding.

Table 3

Attitude Questionnaire

CSR Faculty and Region I Team

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty (N=18)	strongly agree		to	strongly disagree	
Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Current financial conditions should be an important consideration in expanding services for students with handicapping conditions	6	44	6	33	11
	67	22	11	0	0
2. Teachers should require handicapped students to meet the same academic standards as non-handicapped students studying the same course material	6	28	33	17	17
	0	33	11	33	22

(table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty (N=18)	strongly agree		to		strongly disagree
Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
3. The emotional needs of most handicapped students can best be met by placement in special classes for those with handicapping conditions.	0	17	6	44	33
	0	33	0	67	0
4. When handicapped students are in regular classes, regular education suffers.	0	17	6	39	39
	0	22	22	44	11
5. Administrators, in general, have little control over the day-to-day treatment of handicapped students in their institutions.	0	28	6	33	33
	0	11	0	56	33

(table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
	strongly agree		to		strongly disagree
CSR faculty (N=18) / Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
6. The educational needs of most handicapped students can best be met by placement in regular classes for most of the day.	11	33	22	33	0
	0	67	0	33	0
7. Students with special needs cannot compete with normal students in most education programs.	0	11	22	44	22
	0	33	11	56	0
8. A handicapped student will probably develop a better self-concept as a result of being placed in a regular class.	11	50	28	11	0
	11	67	11	11	0

(table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
	strongly agree to strongly disagree				
CSR faculty (N=18) / Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Handicapped students should be included in regular educational programs even if they cannot benefit from standard instructional materials.	0	17	17	50	17
	0	56	22	22	0
10. Administrators should accept responsibility for the daily treatment of handicapped students in their districts.	39	44	0	17	0
	22	67	0	11	0
11. Special techniques can be developed to improve learning of students with special needs in most educational programs.	33	61	0	6	0
	44	56	0	0	0

 (table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty (N=18)	strongly agree		to		strongly disagree
Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
12. Students who have special needs have problems that are often uncontrollable.	0	6	39	39	17
	0	22	0	78	0
13. It is realistic to expect non-teaching staff, e.g., administrators, janitors, secretaries, counselors, to be prepared to handle the special needs of handicapped students.	22	56	11	11	0
	22	56	11	0	11
14. When handicapped students are mainstreamed, they are unfairly placed in embarrassing and frustrating situations.	6	0	11	56	17
	0	22	22	56	0

(table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty (N=18)	strongly agree		to		strongly disagree
Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
15. Vocational programs for the handicapped are a sham because they prepare students for jobs that do not exist.	6	11	33	44	6
	0	11	0	89	0
16. If a student cannot achieve the normal skills necessary for success in a subject, s/he should not be involved in the program.	0	28	22	44	6
	0	22	22	56	0
17. Students with special needs can be evaluated by tests designed for school-wide administration, e.g., PEP, Regents.	0	28	28	28	17
	0	22	22	56	0

 (table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty (N=18)	strongly agree				to strongly disagree
Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
18. Students with special needs should not be included in vocational programs which require the use of potentially dangerous machinery.	0	11	17	56	17
	0	0	22	67	11
19. The improvement of social skills of students with handicapping conditions is a responsibility of the school.	33	61	0	6	0
	33	67	0	0	0

(table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty (N=18)	strongly agree				strongly disagree
Regional Teams (N=9)	1	2	3	4	5
20. PL 94-142 has made significant changes in the education of students with handicapping conditions.	39	33	22	6	0
	44	56	0	0	0

Note. Not all respondents answered every question.

When percentages do not add to 100%, it is because of rounding.

Table 4

Faculty and Region I Team Survey

Need for More Information

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty	little or no need to urgent need				
Region I Team	1	2	3	4	5
I need more information about:					
1 - handicapping conditions	53	21	21	5	0
	22	33	22	11	11
2 - instructional techniques for specific handicapping conditions	21	47	21	5	5
	0	11	33	56	0
3 - BOCES resources	37	21	26	5	11
	44	11	33	11	0
4 - Other resources available to rural districts	11	26	37	16	11
	0	11	11	78	0
5 - Attitude changing techniques	26	32	16	26	0
	0	0	22	67	11

(table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty	little or no need			to urgent need	
Region I Team	1	2	3	4	5
I need more information about:					
6 - Federal and State Laws	26	21	21	32	0
	33	33	22	11	0
7 - New York State Alternative Testing Requirements for students with handicapping conditions	26	5	37	21	11
	44	22	22	11	0
8 - Grant objectives and activities	32	16	47	0	5
	0	22	22	33	22
9 - CSR preservice programs	21	5	53	16	5
	0	0	56	44	0
10- Staff development techniques	16	16	42	21	5
	0	0	33	56	11
11- Problems of rural education[a]	11	11	53	21	5

(table continues)

Statement	Percentage Responding				
CSR faculty	little or no need			to urgent need	
Region I Team	1	2	3	4	5
I need more information about:					
12 - Specifics about rural education[a]	32	21	32	11	5

[a]Not on Region I Survey

Table 5

Faculty Survey

Need for Personal Contact with Persons

Relevant to the Grant Objective

Statement	Percentage Responding: little or no need (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	urgent need (5)
I need to have direct, personal contact with:					
1. Chief School Officers in cooperating districts	47	0	29	18	6
2. teachers on cooperating districts	35	12	29	6	12
3. parents of handicapped in rural districts	47	0	35	6	12
4. rural Board of Education members	53	6	41	0	0
5. handicapped children	41	18	35	0	0
6. grant staff	47	18	35	0	0